DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 669 HE 033 845

TITLE	Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1996 to 1999. Factsheet.
INSTITUTION	California State Postsecondary Education Commission, Sacramento.
REPORT NO	CPEC-F-01-05
PUB DATE	2001-01-00
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Asian American Students; Black Students; College Bound Students; *College Preparation; Ethnicity; *High School Graduates; High Schools; Higher Education; Hispanic American Students; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS	*California; Fact Sheets

ABSTRACT

This factsheet describes important changes in the academic characteristics of recent high school graduates that relate directly to university eligibility and student preparation. Data show that by ethnic-racial group, in 1999, 55% of Asian graduates and 41% of White graduates completed the university-preparatory curricula, while only 26% of Black graduates, 22% of Latino graduates, and 23% of Native American students did so. Between 1996 and 1999 the percentage of graduates who completed Advanced Placement (AP) examinations rose from 14.6% to 16.3%, but large disparities continue to persist in AP participation by racial/ethnic group, with the participation of Asian test takes (31.4%) nearly twice the overall rate of 17.9%, and the AP rate for Black students less than half the overall rate. The number of students taking the Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT) has increased by 15.9% from 1996 to 1999 and the number of students taking the ACT Assessment increased by 16.7%. The average SAT verbal score has increased by 2 points since 1996 but is still below the national mean. The SAT mathematics score, however, has risen to a few score points above the national mean. Statewide SAT performance appears to be associated to some degree with socioeconommic status, as does the average ACT score, which has also increased slightly. (SLD)

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Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1996 to 1999

C. Ratliff

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Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1996 to 1999

A CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION FACTSHEET

As the number of California high school graduates continues to rise over the next 10 years, demand for postsecondary education is expected to increase as well. It also is anticipated that the changing social, cultural, and academic characteristics and expectations of entering students will both challenge and enhance California colleges and universities.

This fact sheet describes important changes in the academic characteristics of recent high school graduates that relate directly to university eligibility and student preparation.

College preparatory curriculum

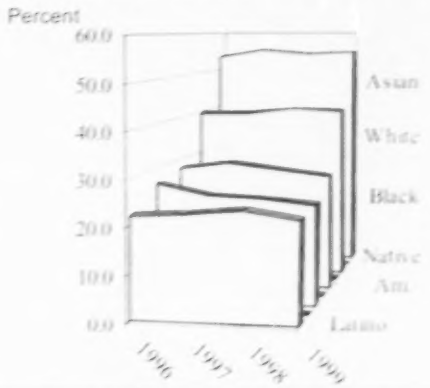
The freshman admission criteria of the California State University and the University of California require applicants to complete nearly identical college preparatory curricula. Since 1994, public high schools have reported annually the proportion of graduates who complete the full set of university required courses with a "C" grade or better. Although the number of public high school graduates has grown by 15.5 percent since 1996, the proportion of graduates who completed the full university college-preparatory curricula dipped slightly in 1999 to 35.6 percent.

By ethnic-racial group, Display 1 shows that in 1999, 55 percent of Asian graduates and 41 percent of White graduates completed the university-preparatory curricula, whereas only 26 percent of Black graduates, 22 percent of Latino graduates, and 23 percent of Native American students did so.

Advanced Placement participation

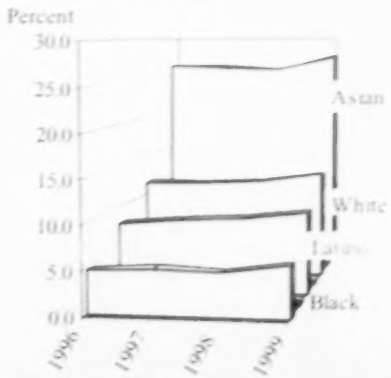
Another indicator of changes in the preparation level of students for college is the increasing number and proportion of California public high school twelfth graders who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses and tests. Earning a score of "3" or better on AP tests may qualify a student for college credit.

DISPLAY 1 Proportion of Public High School Graduates Completing a College Preparatory Curriculum, 1996 to 1999



Between 1996 and 1999, the percentage of graduates who completed AP examinations rose from 14.6 percent to 16.3. Large disparities continue to persist, however, in AP participation by racial-ethnic group, as shown in Display 2. In 1999, for example, the AP participation rate for Asian test takers (31.4) was nearly twice the overall rate of 17.9 percent, whereas the AP rate for Black graduates was less than half the overall rate.

DISPLAY 2 Proportion of California Public High School Twelfth Graders taking Advanced Placement Examinations, 1996 to 1999



Participation and performance on college admissions tests

California public universities require first-time freshman applicants to submit scores for either the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or the American College Testing Assessment (ACT). The University of California also requires students to submit scores for the SAT II: Subject Tests.

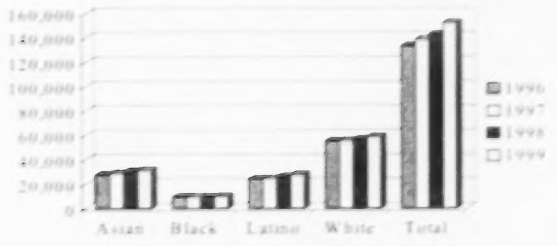
Due in part to the burgeoning size of the State's public and private high school graduating class, the number of students taking the SAT increased by 15.9 percent over the reporting period (1996 to 1999) to 151,636, while the number of ACT test takers increased during the same period by 16.7 percent to 36,954. Displays 3 and 4 show the annual number of SAT I and ACT test takers by racial-ethnic group respectively.

With respect to test performance, the mean SAT Verbal score for California graduates increased between 1996 and 1999 by two points to 497, but it is still below the national mean of 505. California's mean SAT Math score rose by three points during the same period to 514 and it is now a few score points above the national Math mean of 511.

Statewide SAT performance appears to be associated to some degree with socioeconomic status, with students from higher-income families scoring better than students from less affluent families. For example, the mean SAT Verbal score for California students from families with a combined income of more than $100,000 was 557 (as compared to the mean score of all California students of 497), while the mean SAT Math score for the same income group was 575 (as compared to the mean score of all California students of 514).

Over the past three years, the mean ACT composite score for California public and private graduates edged up 0.3 points to 21.3, now slightly above the national mean of 21.0. The ACT composite score is the sum of the English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning sections of the ACT. Like the SAT, the ACT also appears to be associated with socioeconomic status. For example, the mean composite score for students from families with a combined income of more than $100,000 was 23.8, in comparison to the overall mean of 21.2.

DISPLAY 3 California SAT I Tests Takers, 1996 to 1999



DISPLAY 4 California ACT Test Takers, 1996 to 1999

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